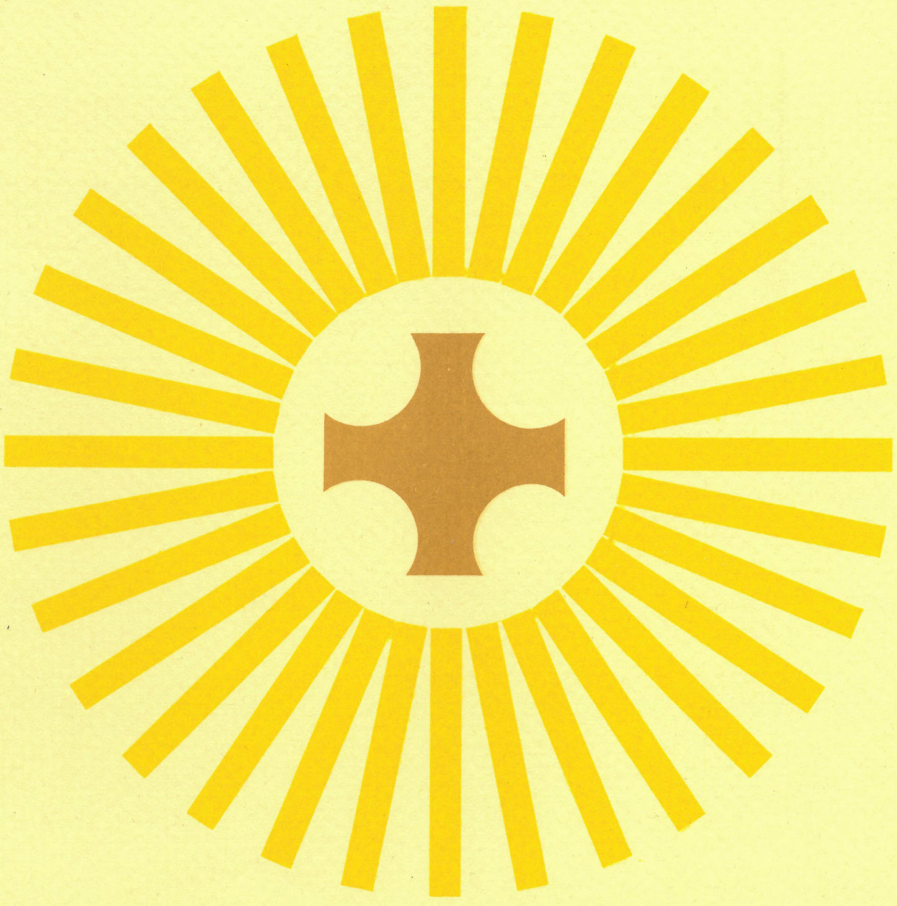
STRENGTH FOR TODAY



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May I enter your hospital room today? I wish to share with you a few meditations which may strengthen you in your confinement. Though I may enter into your experience deeply, I offer no cheap sympathy. I know that you want to bear graciously and courageously that which has been laid upon you. In sharing these thoughts with you, I hope that you may grow in faith and confidence in our Lord.

Behold, a Stranger at the Door...

The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? the Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?

For in the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion: in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me; he shall set me up upon a rock.

Hear, O Lord, when I cry with my voice: have mercy also upon me, and answer me.

I had fainted, unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.

Wait on the Lord: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the Lord.

Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.

Psalm 27:1, 5, 7, 13, 14
Revelation 3:20

A PATIENT once compared his stay in the hospital to a journey in a strange land, passing through lonely places. There are many things which affect us in times of illness, especially when we are confined to a hospital bed. We are cared for by unfamiliar hands. Some hospital procedures may not be fully understood. Thus our confinement becomes a distressing experience.

During such experiences in our lives, we seek to draw on many resources. We need to exercise a certain discipline of mind. If we seek the help of medical science it is necessary to put our trust in those who diagnose our illnesses and to have faith in their judgments. The doctors and nurses will endeavor to win our confidence and do what is best for us as far as they are able.

God has also placed within our grasp some sources of light and strength. Many patients bring their Bibles with them, while others discover the Bible placed at every bedside. As they read it, they often find new meanings which they had not seen or understood before. Some patients share their concerns and experiences with their physician, nurse, or minister. Often a hospital stay lends itself more easily to such consultations. All of these things contribute to a greater fullness of life.

Illness or injury strike unexpectedly and without our bidding. Normal living is suspended, and we find ourselves in strange, uncomfortable, and often painful circumstances. This booklet is an invitation to you to draw on the spiritual resources which point the way to God who can give you life, strength, and confidence.

Give ear to my prayer, O God; and hide not thyself from my supplication.

My heart is sore pained within me: and the terrors of death are fallen upon me.

Fearfulness and trembling are come upon me, and horror hath overwhelmed me.

As for me, I will call upon God; and the Lord shall save me.

Evening, and morning, and at noon, will I pray, and cry aloud: and he shall hear my voice.

Psalm 55:1, 4, 5, 16, 17

"Lord, I Cannot Pray with Many Good Words Today"

THIS PRAYER of a sick man may also express our feelings this day. In times of illness words are hard to find. We may at times feel bottled up to the extent that we find it difficult to express our devotion to God.

Our faith, however, assures us that God understands us in all circumstances of life. Jesus came to this earth to take upon himself the limitations of a human being. He, too, suffered inner agony and pain.

Our devotion to God becomes more meaningful to us if we learn to give ourselves as we really are. God will not cast us aside even though we have failed many times. He is ready to accept us in our weakest moments.

It is not easy to put on a pious mask in a hospital bed. If we try to be something other than our true selves we soon find it difficult not only to pray to God, but also to relate to those who try to minister to our needs. We know from our own experience that it is difficult to love someone who puts on a false front. It is better to give ourselves as we are.

Our Lord does not measure our devotion by the good words that we speak. He is ready to listen to those things which lie deeply in our hearts. Even though we may find it difficult to express these feelings, we know that He abounds in love, grace, and mercy.

I pray, Lord, that Thou wilt help me to open my heart so that I may love Thee more fully. I know that Thou art concerned about me today. Accept my humble praise and thankfulness in Jesus' name. Amen.

My Spiritual Resources

"I know that thou canst do all things,
and that no purpose of thine can be thwarted.
'Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?"
Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand,
things too wonderful for me, which I did not know.
'Hear, and I will speak;
I will question you, and you declare to me.'
I had heard of thee by the hearing of the ear,
but now my eye sees thee;
therefore I despise myself,
and repent in dust and ashes."

Job 42:2-6

A LEGEND tells about a man who had built a castle in which he strung wires from the various pillars and posts. It was his hope that the winds would vibrate these and make music. Day by day he waited, but nothing happened. One day, however, a great storm arose which caused the wires, one by one, to vibrate and play.

Daily we make plans for our lives and prepare for their fulfillment. Sometimes we are disappointed when the outcome is not as we had planned. A day comes when illness suddenly strikes. If we have strung wires of love, kindness, and understanding in our lives, these may play when the storms beat upon us. Our deep inner faith in God's concern enters into the picture in a more intimate way. It may be that God permits illness or accident to come into our lives to cause the chords to play. Or He may be giving you the opportunity to string these wires of love, kindness, and understanding while you are in the hospital and to allow them to be played for the first time.

A patient with a dreaded disease, after being admitted to the hospital thirty-two times, remarked, "I am still able to laugh more than I cry." She had found some inner spiritual strength which cannot be fully comprehended. Together with Job she had learned to say, "I know that thou canst do all things, and that no purpose of thine can be thwarted" (Job 42:2 RSV).

Enable me by Thy Spirit, Lord, to find peace in my heart. Let me never forget that I am Thy child. As I learn to trust Thee more fully I know that I shall gain confidence and strength. It is my desire to serve Thee and to honor Thy name all the days of my life. Amen.

My God Is Concerned About Me

O Lord, our Lord,
How majestic is thy name in all the earth!
Thou whose glory above the heavens is chanted
by the mouth of babes and infants,
thou hast founded a bulwark because of thy foes,
to still the enemy and the avenger.
When I look at thy heavens, the work of thy fingers,
the moon and the stars which thou hast established;
what is man that thou art mindful of him,
and the son of man that thou dost care for him?
Yet thou hast made him little less than God,
and dost crown him with glory and honor.
Thou hast given him dominion over the works
of thy hands;
thou hast put all things under his feet,
all sheep and oxen,
and also the beasts of the field,
the birds of the air,
and the fish of the sea,
whatever passes along the paths of the sea.
O Lord, our Lord,
how majestic is thy name in all the earth!

Psalm 8

CENTURIES AGO, as the psalmist contemplated God's creation and man's place in it, he broke forth in praise and adoration. The wonder and the greatness of the universe were beyond his comprehension.

Today, with the help of science our view of God's creation has been greatly extended. The telescope has revealed many solar systems beyond our own. The microscope, on the other hand, has probed into the mysteries of creation deeper than the psalmist dreamed of three thousand years ago.

In his song of praise, however, the psalmist also asked, "What is man that thou [God] art mindful of him?" To him man seemed so insignificant in comparison to the vastness of the whole creation, yet God has bestowed upon him glory and honor. Perhaps you and I also have asked, Who am I that God should care for me? Is He concerned about my personal welfare? Am I not too unimportant amid all the wonders of this world for God to answer my prayers?

A lady once shared a personal concern for one of her friends. She said, "There is a little place in my heart which nobody fits but just her." This observation revealed the distinct place which each of her friends had in her life.

Jesus shared with us some similar attributes of the father-heart of God. You and I also have a place of special significance in His plan of salvation. He has created each one of us with a distinct personality and for specific purposes. He also knows our personal needs and concerns. He is ready to help us individually as we seek to carry out His will in our lives.

Lord, Take Away Pain

The cry of man's anguish went up unto God,
"Lord, take away pain!
The shadow that darkens the world Thou hast made;
The close coiling chain
That strangles the heart; the burden that weighs
On the wings that would soar—
Lord, take away pain from the world Thou hast made
That it love Thee the more!"
Then answered the Lord to the cry of His world,
"Shall I take away pain,
And with it the power of the soul to endure,
Made strong by the strain?
Shall I take away pity, that knits heart to heart,
And sacrifice high?
Will ye lose all your heroes that lift from the fire
White brows to the sky?
Shall I take away love that redeems with a price,
And smiles at its loss?
Can ye spare from your lives that would climb unto mine
The Christ on His cross?"

Found on the wall of a Denver hospital

A CITY newspaper once ran a feature article on a girl in the hospital who was incapable of feeling pain. The doctors, on her request, were doing everything they could to restore to this child the capacity of normal pain perceptions. Those who suffer on a hospital bed may think it strange that this girl would desire to have these feelings restored. Would she not be happier if she would never experience any pain?

This girl, however, missed something which far outweighed pain and suffering. She could not feel the warmth of the sun, the softness of a kitten, the love in a mother's embrace, and the firm security of a father's hand. All these experiences of a normal childhood were denied her.

In God's comprehensive plan for us there is a place for pain in our lives as well as joy. It is a part of God's wisdom to give us these varied experiences of life for our own physical, emotional, and spiritual development. As the cross of Christ is the foundation of God's redemptive plan, our afflictions may give meaning to our lives.

A child of God does not regard illness or suffering as an end in itself. He believes that there is a higher purpose in all experiences of life. If we should remove all possibilities of suffering, there would be less spiritual awareness. Even the common term, "growing pains," may be relevant. Can there be growth without pain?

The healing process, if it is to take place, also requires all of our personal resources—mind, body, and spirit. We cannot ask others to heal us if we are not ready to cooperate and put forth some effort ourselves. We must want to be healed. As the little girl asked her doctors to restore her ability to feel, so we need to ask God to make us whole in order that we may again fulfill the purposes which He has in mind for us.

My Faith Looks Up

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy we have been born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and to an inheritance which is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

In this you rejoice, though now for a little while you may have to suffer various trials, so that the genuineness of your faith, more precious than gold which though perishable is tested by fire, may redound to praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Without having seen him you love him; though you do not now see him you believe in him and rejoice with unutterable and exalted joy. As the outcome of your faith you obtain the salvation of your souls.

1 Peter 1:3-9

A CHILD of God learns to live by faith. He may not always understand the paths in which he is led. Many times he may ask why God permits suffering, persecution, and misfortune to befall His people. Through these difficult experiences of life the Christian feels the need for an inner fortitude—a faith in a loving heavenly Father.

The Apostle Peter, too, sensed this need in his life. There were times when he failed to find the strength which he desired. He, however, had a very remarkable trait, namely that he recognized his weakness. When his faith in Jesus Christ faltered, he sought forgiveness and again made every effort to re-establish the intimate relation he had had to his Lord. He knew that he could not bear his burdens alone. Thus he later wrote of faith as being more precious than gold.

A physician once said, "Faith belongs to life." God has instilled it in our lives for a purpose. In times of illness our fears and disappointments loom very large before our eyes. When pain wracks the body, the minutes pass very slowly—the darkness of the night seems endless. In such moments we begin to seek for something which will again restore our strength and confidence. Faith then proves to be a built-in healing agency. Its value cannot be overestimated.

O Lord, permit me to see a new light shining out of the darkness, a glimmer of hope in times of despair. If Thou art using this experience to prepare me for further service, help me to understand Thy ways so that I may not falter. Allow me to sense Thy nearness this day and give me strength to walk faithfully in Thy paths so that I can overcome all that is sinful, evil, or distressing. Humbly I pray these petitions in Christ's name. Amen.

Your God Shall Be My God

Ruth said, "Entreat me not to leave you or to return from following you; for where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God; where you die I will die, and there will I be buried. May the Lord do so to me and more also if even death parts me from you.' And when Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more.

Ruth 1:16-18

WE ARE dependent on one another. A patient in a hospital may not feel free to relate to others right away. His feelings may be like a homing pigeon when it is released. It will circle its immediate surroundings a few times before it instinctively finds its way to its home cote. The hospital patient also needs a little time to get his bearings before he can establish meaningful relations.

It is not good that we set ourselves apart from others in a world-excluding "I am." God placed us in a social setting when He created this universe in which we are dependent one on another. To isolate oneself from all these relations is not healthy. We need a sense of belonging.

A patient once told her minister that she never wanted to go home again. Even though her husband had recently built a new house and though he provided for her generously, she felt as though she could never find happiness outside of the hospital walls. She requested that her door be closed and that no one be permitted to visit her. She sought thereby to sever all important relations.

It is not easy for us to imagine such feelings in our lives when we are well. To enter into this woman's experience would cause us to re-examine our own relations with one another and with God.

Father, I thank Thee for love. As Thou dost care for us, even as children of Thine, so we learn to be concerned about one another. Our hearts yearn for compassion and understanding. We do not want to be left alone. Thus I pray that I may respond to Thy love and to the love of my family and friends in an appreciative manner. Teach me to love as Jesus loved. Amen.

O Father, who desirest that which is best for all, I would lift up my eyes to Thee in faith, knowing that Thou dost seek to deliver Thy children from those things that hurt them. Thou dost not want them to suffer hardships which are beyond their physical and spiritual endurance.

Help me to surrender that which may block Thy healing power in my life. If there are motives of selfishness, blot them out of my mind; if there are sinful ways, cleanse my heart. Teach me to be pure in thought and deed so that I can sense Thy nearness this day.

Make me sensitive to human need, and let Thy compassion flow through me so that I may serve others in the spirit of Jesus, my Lord and my Saviour. Let my life be a channel of Thy love so that I may experience and share it with others who are ill. Keep me from selfishness and self-pity.

I thank Thee for this day and the many blessings, as well as the trials, which it holds. It is another day of grace. Help me to make the most of it in worship, in service, and in fellowship with others and with Thee.

I pray for the doctors, the nurses, and other members of the healing team of this hospital. Direct their paths in righteousness. Allow them to feel Thy nearness this day in the responsibilities which Thou hast ordained for them to carry out in Thy name.

Through Jesus Christ, our Lord, I pray. Amen.

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